

We spoke about the differences between Islam and Westernism last week. As you can see, these are two opposing philosophies – submission to Allahﷻ or submission to desire – which are mutually exclusive and irreconcilable. There can never be a compromise between them. One must necessarily submit to the other. That is the distinguishing factor, the signature of the Muslim, that he/she subjugates their desire to the Will and Pleasure of Allahﷻ. A Muslim recognizes and joyfully accepts that it is the purpose of his creation to please Allahﷻ and does that in the way taught by Muhammadﷺ the Messenger of Allahﷻ. That is the essence of the Kalima: La ilaha illAllahu Muhammadur Rasoolullahi: There is nobody worthy of worship except Allahﷻ (so I worship him) and Muhammadﷺ is the Messengerﷺ (last and final) of Allahﷻ (so I obey and follow him). There are no qualifiers to this statement of faith, this declaration and oath, thanks to which a person enters Islam. It is a statement that is applicable to every person who wishes to enter Islam and remain in it, whether it is in the East or West or anywhere else. This is our Creed. This is what makes us Muslim and is our face and signature. Obedience to Allahﷻ in the way of Rasoolullahﷺ is its essence. And that doesn't change for anyone or any place.

Is Islam compatible with 'Westernism', the philosophy? No, it isn't. But is it possible for people living in the West; the location, to live by Islam? Yes, without a doubt. That is why I began with the definition because when we ask about raising Muslim children in the West, we are not speaking about what we need to do in the location but what we must do with

combating those parts of 'Westernism' as an ideology that are antithetical to Islam. Combat it is. Make no mistake. Like combat, it requires knowledge, understanding, a clear strategy, courage, has risk, is painful; potentially fatal if you fail and joyful and rewarding if you succeed. It is a serious business, not an intellectual exercise. The cost and benefit are both very real. The first thing to teach therefore is to draw attention to the definition so that people realize that there is nothing 'special' about the 'West' as a location which requires Islam to be reengineered, interpreted, or changed to suit people living in the so-called 'West'. Islam is Islam, no matter where the Muslim may live. As I said last week, it is like the principles of flight. They don't change for any country. They have to do with flight, not with where you fly the plane.

What are the challenges of raising a child in the West?

The challenges have nothing to do with the location but with 'Westernism', which is global and inside us. What we teach our children and indeed before that, what we need to come to terms with ourselves is the following:

1. **Goal Reset:** First and foremost, check, guide, and mould their standards, goals, and aspirations. For that, first, check your own. I have spoken to many young boys in America. Children of our Musallis as well as children of my non-Muslim friends. What strikes me is that there is no difference in their goals and aspirations. That is in my view, the first red flag. The road depends on the destination. If you want to change the road, you must change the destination. As an exercise,

when you go home today, sit your family down and ask them to write their life goal. You write your own. Then check to see where Allahﷻ comes into it.

2. **Course correction:** Bring Allahﷻ into your home, your conversation, your budget, and your aspirations. Talk about Allahﷻ, encourage your children to donate to charity – measure it. I know we have many in this congregation who are big donors to this masjid. See what your children are donating. If they are not, then you know what that means. Check the programs you watch on TV, the books you read, the conversation you have – what is its content? All these color aspirations, focus and results. If you talk about the Dunya constantly, that is what will dominate your life. If you never talk about the Aakhira, it will never be your focus.
3. **Set boundaries:** Teach them respect for boundaries by respecting them yourself. Boundaries are the essence of parenting. Teach them that being Muslim means to recognize and accept the Supremacy of Allahﷻ and that obedience and allegiance is only to Him. This is the most fundamental principle which must be taught, practiced, and demonstrated. This must be the differentiator of the Muslim, no matter where he/she lives. This is what drives every decision and action. This is the safety belt. Put it on or die.
4. **Forget popularity:** You didn't get elected to the position of Mom or Dad. You gave birth to your children. Focus on being inspirational, respected, and held in awe. Not liked. It is necessary to define

boundaries without fearing unpopularity. Whether it is in parenting or in religion or in politics. All corruption begins when people who should know better, remain silent when they should speak. Christianity is losing people in Europe even though the church, to be popular, has legalized almost everything the Bible prohibits. But it is gaining converts in Asia and Africa where it is not so flexible and where local cultures also support boundaries. People need definitive rules. A free for all may sound nice but, it is free for some, at the expense of others. Boundaries, like seat belts, restrict some freedom but save lives. Security is inversely proportionate to convenience.

5. **Allahﷻ First:** Teach them to love Allahﷻ which is an outcome of Shukr (Thankfulness). An attitude of gratitude, where we are thankful to Allahﷻ for His mercy and blessings. Allahﷻ said about the Believers, that they love Him more than anything else.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَندَادًا يُحِبُّوهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ
وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ

Baqara 2: 165. And of mankind are some who take (for worship) others besides Allah as rivals (to Allah). They love them as they love Allah. But those who believe, love Allah more (than anything else).

6. **Love Allahﷻ :** Islam is submission and submission is always difficult, except when it is because of love. Remember that without the Love, Glory and Majesty of Allahﷻ in the heart, obedience becomes a burden. Force or so-called logic are not substitutes, because they can both be countered to one's own detriment. In Islam, the fundamental rule is

that we obey Allahﷻ because He is Allahﷻ. We pray because Allahﷻ told us that it is the way to get close to Him and we want to be close to Him. We don't pray to 'discharge static electricity from our heads in Sujood' (sic). Or because the bending and standing is good for the joints or digestion. We don't fast because it is good for health or to lose weight or to know how poor people feel. We don't give Zakat to ensure distribution of wealth in society. We don't do Hajj to reinforce or show solidarity to the global Muslim Ummah. We do all these because we love Allahﷻ. That is not only sufficient reason, but also the very best of reasons. After all, love begins where reason ends. Allahﷻ ordered us to establish Salah as the way to remember Him and our relationship to Him. He said:

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي

Ta-Ha 20: 14. *"Verily! I am Allah! La ilaha illa Ana (none has the right to be worshipped but I), so worship Me, and establish As-Salat (Iqamat-as-Salat) for My Remembrance.*

Salah is the meter. It is the criterion. It is the standard for all of life. Whenever Rasoolullahﷺ was asked about anything, he answered in terms of Salah as he did in Hadith Jibreel. Our Salah, its quality and our attitude towards it, demonstrates and is a measure of the state of our Imaan. Salah is the physical manifestation of the Kalima. It is the demonstration in action that we worship only Allahﷻ and follow the Sunnah of Rasoolullahﷺ. Islam begins with Salah. Let us honor that.